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AMERICAN, ENGLISH, AND DUTCH THEOLOGICAL EDUCATION¹

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To the student of differing methods of education the chief interest of a comparison between English, Continental, and American methods is that the first two represent entirely different views as to objects and methods, while American education is a compromise between them. It is therefore perhaps desirable before proceeding to discuss theological education in particular to develop a little more fully the general characteristics of the three forms.

The most important characteristic of English education is that in the English university the period of training in general culture, as distinct from professional instruction, is carried on longer, further, and to a more advanced stage than in any other country. The normally well-educated Englishman lives at a boarding-school, commonly known as a public school, from thirteen to between eighteen and nineteen. During this time he is taught Latin and Greek extremely well, mathematics not very well, French and German rather badly. He is encouraged, and if necessary forced, to acquaint himself with the general outlines of ancient and modern history, and with the classics of English literature. He is given no instruction in what is known as English,²

¹An address delivered before the Alumni Association of the Harvard Divinity School, June 20, 1917.

²The amount of time spent on this subject in an American school seems to most Britishers to be an appalling waste. The English boy who is taught it indirectly seems more frequently to achieve an approximation to grammatical idiom than the American boy who is taught it directly. But of course this is only possible where Latin and Greek are taught well, which is rarely the case in America.

except in so far as he is made to write correct English when translating other languages, is from time to time required to write essays, and is examined at intervals on what is called general information. I never had a lesson in my life primarily on English grammar, nor have most of my friends. The result is that a normally intelligent boy of eighteen and a half can generally be trusted to translate Latin and Greek into English or English into Latin and Greek with a considerable degree of idiomatic skill. He has probably no very accurate knowledge of dates but a fairly good grasp of the general outlines of the history of the world. Curiously and tragically enough, the part which he knows least well is that of modern Europe. At this stage he goes on to Oxford or Cambridge, where the education given him is merely the continuation and intensification of what he has already received. He has an abundant choice of "electives" at this point, but in general must choose between a combination of classics, history, and philosophy on the one hand, or mathematics and natural science on the other. His degree at the end of his career depends on his general knowledge of these subjects and not on the number of courses which he has followed; theoretically he need follow none. But in any case the education he receives is concerned entirely with his general culture, and has nothing to do with any professional or technical requirements.

Another characteristic of this education is that it is directed chiefly to the acquisition and accurate idiomatic expression of codified knowledge. The student is taught with great thoroughness and skill the existing state of knowledge on the subject which he is studying, but he is not encouraged to study problems which are unsolved or to think that it is his business or anybody else's to solve them. The result is that Oxford turns out every year a number of men who are admirably qualified

to give a good and pleasant exposition of philosophy or history. Nor is this exposition merely superficial; it goes to the bottom of things and leaves out nothing so far as codification has been reached. It is not superficial; but it is stationary and somewhat timid. It does not encourage men to attempt the solution or even the presentation of fresh problems, and therefore the amount of original work ever produced by these men is pitifully small. After all, there is no way which secures such a pleasant and rounded presentation of a case as an inability to see its limitations, so that that divine discontent with generally accepted solutions which inspires the researcher is a drawback rather than a help to the attainment of the highest distinction in an English university. It is often remarked that young Oxford lecturers produce little good original work. The cause has been sought in many directions, but I think the truth is that the system of training and examination encourages sterile brilliancy. They do not produce because they cannot.

The general result, therefore, is that by the age of twenty-three, when the normal Englishman takes his A.B. degree, he is an extremely well-educated man in codified knowledge with no professional or technical training, and has perhaps been injured rather than helped for any purpose of scientific research by the training through which he has passed. I believe that there has been a tendency in the modern-science schools at Cambridge to try to remedy this defect, and Professor Firth at Oxford has struggled hard to introduce a better state of things in the history school at Oxford.

If a man needs professional training he will probably begin it at this stage, and his comparatively advanced age will inevitably make him try to obtain it quickly and cheaply. The result is that beyond controversy advanced technical or professional education in England is bad, compared with that in other great countries.

The situation on the Continent is entirely different. It would probably be best to take Germany as typical, but as I know the Dutch very much better than I do any other Continental nation, I take Holland. There is in point of fact very little difference between any of the Teutonic countries. In Holland a boy goes to a day-school, either to the Gymnasium or to the Hoogeburgh-school. In the first he is taught Latin, Greek, English, German, French, history, geography, mathematics, and elementary science. In the latter Greek is omitted and science is emphasized. The teaching is good and very intensive. A Dutch boy probably works nearly twice as many hours every year as an American boy, who does less work than any child that I have ever met. School begins at half-past eight in the morning, continues, if I remember rightly, until twelve, with an interval of twenty minutes somewhere in the middle of the morning, goes on again for two hours in the afternoon, and ends up with an hour or more of home work. Moreover the school year begins at the end of September and goes on until almost the end of July. Experience made me think that this scheme of education was too strenuous; but most of the Dutch children live through it without grievous harm, though I doubt if English or American boys could do so. The result is that somewhere between eighteen and nineteen they know about as much as the ordinary American A.B. and decidedly more than a boy of the same age in England, though not so much as an Englishman when he leaves college; but this is the end of their general education, which is "prescribed" from beginning to end. They then go up to the university, and their professional education begins at once, for the Dutch university corresponds entirely to the graduate school of an American university, and there is nothing which corresponds with the college. Thus the professional career of a man in England begins after he has taken his

university degree; on the Continent, when he leaves school.

If we now turn to professional education and take up the career of the man who is going to be a minister, the difference entailed by the variations between the English and the Dutch systems becomes apparent. The English student can stay on if he likes at the university and study theology. Neither in Oxford nor in Cambridge is this a particularly good form of training, but it is the best there is. Ecclesiastical interests have effectually toned down, even where they have not entirely suppressed, anything resembling scientific study of theology, and great scholars who are not Anglicans are debarred from professorial chairs, and, in Oxford even from degrees in divinity. The man who has already spent four years at the university crowds his theology into one extra year and is taught rapidly the solution of problems the real nature of which has never been properly stated to him. Moreover, inadequate though this system is, it is still feared as too radical, and there is a general tendency on the part of ecclesiastical advisers to urge men not to study theology at the universities, on the ground that it is liable to destroy faith. The result is that most men who are entering the ministry of the English Church go to some of the numerous theological schools scattered about England under the control of the bishops. The teaching in these schools is frankly denominational and unscientific. It could, indeed, scarcely be worse. Third-rate theology is taught by second-rate men to ill-educated hearers, and pupils and teachers between them achieve a certainty of statement which is in inverse ratio to their understanding of the facts. I was myself at Cuddesdon, which is one of the best of these schools. I had a very pleasant time there, but the teaching was bad, and when I sought for advice on difficult points I was warned against pride and urged to go to confession.

The situation in Holland is entirely different. The professors are appointed by the state and own allegiance to no denomination. But the Dutch Church is wise enough to refuse the entrance to its ministry to men who have not studied theology at one of the State universities. The ordinary career lasts three years, and includes Greek, Hebrew, the study of heathen religions, the Old and New Testaments, Church history, and some philosophy. The State does not teach systematic theology, on the ground that if it is scientific it is indistinguishable from philosophy, and that if it is based on a special revelation its understanding has been intrusted to the Churches and cannot be expected from State professors. To fill up this gap the State allows each Church to appoint a professor of its own to give instruction in systematic theology and in any other subjects which they may think right. The implied suggestion that the State professors have no religion and the ecclesiastical professors no science has worked curiously. Each has been so anxious to show that the suggestion is false that they have sometimes reversed their positions, and students have been known to complain of the undue pietism of the State professor and of the fierce intellectualism of the representatives of the Church. The shortest period of instruction is four years—one of them in the State curriculum, and one with the professors of the Church. This makes a man a “Kandidaat”; but the best students do not stop here, although the examinations which come at the end of their third and fourth years entitle them to become ministers. Most of them go on and take a doctor’s degree, which usually requires at least two, and probably three, more years’ work. The standard of excellence reached by these doctors of theology naturally varies. There are many men who achieve the degree by a kind of intellectual brute force. The favorite method is known in some circles as “body-snatching,” for it is

said that the easiest way to a doctor's degree is to dig up a dead divine of the seventeenth century and write his life. This requires industry but little else. At the same time I think that this part of the Dutch theological education is probably the best. Its strength is that it introduces men not to codified knowledge but to "knowledge in the making," in a manner which is scarcely ever done in England. They learn to handle documents and to distrust books about books. Instead of going to lectures and listening to the more or less stereotyped lectures of the professors, they take their difficulties to the various members of the faculty and discuss general principles of work and thought.

If one now compares the American system with the English and the Dutch, it becomes plain how largely it is an attempt to combine the English and the Continental systems. American education started with the Latin School in Boston, and Harvard College was founded in imitation of the English University of Cambridge, just as the Latin School was the imitation or rather perpetuation of the grammar-school system of England. So far there was no difference in principle between the English and the American system; but in the nineteenth century Americans who had been in Europe tried to do for their own country what Berlin or Leipzig had done for Germany. But instead of reforming the whole system on a German model, they added on to the top of the existing colleges a superstructure of graduate schools. The result is that, whereas England has schools and colleges but no graduate schools worthy of the name and Germany or Holland has schools and universities which correspond in method and purpose to the graduate schools but has no colleges, America has the three institutions of schools, colleges, and graduate schools. It is perhaps worth noting that one result of this is that the age at which a boy goes to college in

America is considerably younger than that at which he generally goes to the University in Holland.

On the whole, I believe that the American system is the best of the three, or might become so if it were better worked. I intensely disliked the abrupt termination of general education which the student underwent in Holland, and I am sure that it is a good thing to bring men after they leave school into contact with scholars and to allow them to develop on freer lines than is possible in a school. The weak points seem to me to be the inferior education given in the schools and the disastrous effect of the course system in college. But these are defects of which every one is aware and they are sure to disappear in time. The system of final examinations already introduced at Harvard in the Divinity School and in the History Department is a move in the right direction which has already justified itself in the eyes of those who have seen it in working.

To summarize then the whole, it may be said that the English method sends out men who have received a higher degree of general culture; the Dutch system is preëminent in the teaching of scientific theology; the American comes half-way between the two, though it approximates more closely to the Dutch standard than to the English. Perhaps I may make explicit what I mean by saying that the Dutch student who leaves off as a "Kandidaat" is as a rule better equipped with general theological knowledge than the Bachelor of Theology of the Harvard Divinity School. But the Doctor of Theology of Harvard is at least as good as, and, on his own subject, probably better than the Doctor of Theology at Leiden. Both Dutch and American are incomparably better than the English product so far as scientific theology is concerned, though the average of general culture and power of expression is higher with the English system than with either the Dutch or the American, and for the

general efficiency of the clergy this is a large compensation for their intellectual handicap.

The important point is, however, that though the American and Dutch systems are successful in making scientific students and teachers, they are no better than the English for the successful making of ministers. This is not to praise the English system. For the great problem of theological education today is that none of us is succeeding in making ministers who can maintain the influence of the Churches as they ought. Both in England and in Holland the general complaint is made that the Liberal ministers are unsuccessful in holding their congregations. In Holland the successful minister, with very few exceptions, belongs to a reactionary form of Calvinism, in England to a bastard Catholicism. Neither type is liberal in its intellectual position nor is in the least likely to be influenced by scientific theology, which it regards as the invention of the Evil One. Outside of their ranks there are, it is true, many Liberal clergy in England and there are even more in Holland, but they are not gaining in strength and they are not keeping their Churches even moderately full. Now these men are the products of the theological schools in Holland; and in England, so far as the teaching of theology in the universities by men like Sanday and Burkitt has had any effect at all, it has been on the production of the Liberal clergy. Therefore to say that they are failing is to indict the whole system of the professional training of ministers.

I would not claim to be certain what the reason is and I should deprecate any revolutionary suggestions; but in the belief that the situation in America, though not so bad, presents already some disquieting symptoms and is likely to present more, I propose to venture on a few criticisms. Our present system is based on the inherited belief that the most important thing for a minister is to be able to expound Christian theology. But congre-

gations as a whole have settled down in Liberal Churches to the conviction, firmly held though not always very clearly expressed, that, though they wish to retain what they regard as the Christian religion, they do not think that the Christian theology is necessary to salvation or, indeed, always acceptable to the intelligent. This does not mean that they do not desire a rational and intelligible discussion of the problems of religion; on the contrary, there are few things which are more desired by most men and many women, and the clergy err grievously in so seldom recognizing this fact. But it does mean, in the first place, that they reject, partly as untrue, partly as unintelligible, traditional theology, and, in the second place, that they ask for light and leading on the difficult problems of conduct presented by modern life. The demand is primarily, though not exclusively, for ethical rather than metaphysical thought.

Let me put the same matter a little differently. In the time of our forefathers men believed that there was a definite and infallible gospel. If a man believed this gospel and lived in accordance with it, he would secure his salvation in the next world. This gospel was not the discovery of any human being but was the direct revelation of God to man, who could not have known anything about it if he had not been divinely instructed. The minister was the minister of the gospel because he knew accurately this divine message and could expound it correctly. Under these circumstances the minister always had something to say, could speak from a position of advantage, and his congregation had adequate reason for listening to him. It was important for both sides that the Bible and the theology based upon it should be adequately learned and taught, because it was necessary to the salvation of a man's soul.

With the coming of the Liberal movements this whole edifice has been destroyed. Liberal theologians con-

tinue to speak of theology, but in point of fact they no longer believe in any theology based on a special revelation, and they retain the use of the word "revelation" only by using it in a sense which would have been abhorrent to the theologians of the past. So far as I have been able to see, no modern Liberal theologian bases his position on anything except the facts of experience by the individual and the race, interpreted in the light of reason, and not as a supernatural revelation, although some of them achieve a verbal reconciliation between this view and traditional phraseology by saying that this experience *is* a supernatural revelation.

I do not see that this kind of theology really differs from philosophy. It is, in fact, merely a subdivision of philosophy which tries to coördinate the phenomena of religion with the rest of life. There can be no philosophy worthy of the name which does not do this, and the philosophers of other times occupied themselves with its problems just as much as do our theologians. But in those days the philosopher and the theologian were distinguished from one another because the theologian dealt with facts which had been communicated, as no other facts had been, by divine revelation and had not been discovered by reason or research. We have given up that which distinguished theology in the past from philosophy, and I am not sure that we have any right to use the word for our modern systems.

Whether it be called theology or philosophy, it is a mistake, I think, to suppose that because men no longer think that salvation depends on theology they are therefore not interested in philosophic teaching. I feel sure that the man in the pew is interested in it and expects to hear something about it. Unfortunately both in Holland and in England clerical opinion does not recognize this fact, and the young minister is constantly warned not to preach theology. Terrible stories are told of

men who emptied their churches by preaching sermons on the *Communicatio Idiomatum*. No doubt the church was emptied, but the reason was not because the man preached theology but because he spoke a jargon unknown to his congregation and probably unintelligible to himself. Philosophy or theology deals with ultimates, with the first and last things of human thought. It is desirable that all ministers should know and should understand the history of thought on these points, but it is also desirable that they should speak about them in simple language in a way which an ordinary man can understand and that they should know the meaning of the words which they use.

We are not so badly off in America in this respect, or rather we suffer from a different complaint. So many ministers and, still more, so many theological students, seem to have new systems of theology which may possess many "inspirational" merits but have not that of logic. I am convinced that there are few things which are more needed in all the Churches in this country than that the theological schools should train up a generation of preachers who would be more, rather than less, "theological," but would recognize that the repetition of a phrase in a wrong sense does not supply an argument, and that the rapid circulation of words can never be a substitute for reason. Perhaps I may venture to express the belief that the Harvard Divinity School is doing few things of greater value at the present time than forcing students in theology to explain the phrases which they make use of at oral examinations. Nothing would induce me to submit to the process myself, but I have been present at it often enough to realize its educative value. We need better philosophy or theology, not less.

Nevertheless, however we may prize intelligible theology, no one now makes the claim in the old sense that it is necessary for the salvation of a single soul, even of

his own, that his system of theology should be believed or even understood. Express it how we may, nearly all of us have come to think of salvation, if we use the term at all, as meaning progress in the right direction rather than the attainment of a final destination, and believe that progress depends, not on the acceptance of any given formula, but on the right use by men, whether as individuals or as a society, of all their faculties, physical, intellectual, and moral.

Therefore what the minister is required to do is to help men to use these faculties in the right way, and the use of faculties depends almost entirely upon circumstances. It is not very difficult to lay down abstract rules about right and wrong, but it is extremely hard to decide what is right or wrong under a given set of circumstances. It therefore follows that no man can be an effective minister unless he is able to stand out as preëminent for his knowledge of the circumstances of life, as the ministers of the past were for their knowledge of theology. No one can teach usefully on the moral issues of modern life if he does not know what the circumstances of modern life really are. But this raises the question whether it is possible to raise up a class of men whose occupation from the beginning is to study the circumstances of life in relation to their moral issues and to talk about them without being professionally engaged in them. Is it not probable that it will more and more obviously pass the powers of any human being fully to understand all the complicated circumstances of modern life, and especially the problems provided by occupations in which he is not professionally engaged? Personally I admit that I am far more stimulated by hearing a lawyer discuss the moral problems of law and a business man discuss the problems of business than I am by hearing the most gifted pulpit orator discussing the same subjects. I admit that in one way the pulpit orator generally has the advantage. He is able to use

a larger vocabulary with greater artistic effect and to make the whole problem appear easy. Some preachers are so gifted in this respect that they seem able to solve all modern problems by the magic touch of the homiletic art. After hearing them one feels that the problem of capital and labor can be solved by the application of a text from St. Paul; it is a shock to find that the representatives of capital in the congregation do not share this hope. Such preaching does not represent the best Christian tradition, least of all in New England; it is more akin to Dio Chrysostom. But it is unfair to blame the preachers. The truth is that modern life is too complex for one man to understand it all, and therefore I rather doubt whether it will be possible by any conceivable method of education to train up men to talk hebdomadally on all the moral problems of present-day life. I believe that the Churches would be well advised to invite prominent professional members of their congregations into the pulpit in order to obtain the statements on the moral issues of modern life of men who know by experience where the difficulties really are.

But preaching or teaching is not everything; there is another side to the professional work of a minister. The great strength of the Roman Catholic Church is that it makes an effort to deal with those who are spiritually sick in the only way in which sickness can be dealt with successfully—by taking each case separately as an individual problem. I do not mean to suggest that the Catholic method of the confessional is desirable or that the theory of sin and absolution with which it is bound up is capable of intelligent defense, but merely that it gives the Catholic the enormous advantage of taking each case of spiritual sickness separately, while the Protestant tries to deal with all cases *en masse* in the pulpit. For in any case the treatment of these cases must be one of the true concerns of any Christian Church, and

neither in England, in Holland, nor in America is there any sufficient attempt made to teach men how to fulfil these duties, which are becoming far better understood by doctors, lawyers, and social workers than they are by ministers.

Exactly how instruction in this matter ought to be given I do not know; but I can see plainly that the lecture room is not the right place, even though a university ought to undertake its organization. It seems to me that we ought to follow the example of doctors. The medical profession gives some of its instruction in the lecture room; but the most important part of it is given in the wards of a hospital. To my mind the most complete analogue to the wards of a hospital is the prison and the penitentiary. It is to those places that spiritual sickness, when long enough neglected, inevitably comes, just as disease in the last resource comes to the surgeon. But the medical student is taught by the surgeon how in many cases this tragedy might have been prevented or mitigated, and men are urged to consult doctors in order to prevent the spread of disease. Would it not be possible for the future minister to be educated on some such lines as the doctor? Show to him and let him study the worst cases of spiritual disease, in order that he may recognize the symptoms and know the remedy before it has gone so far in other cases. The work need not be confined to prisons or penitentiaries, for every parish provides some analogues to those who are under medical treatment, and every minister has experience of those who are spiritually sick. But to do this theological schools need the coöperation of ministers. At the present time, from the point of view of education, many of our students are wasting their time and forming bad intellectual habits by "supplying" pulpits while they are still at the School. The only excuse for the practice is that they need the money; but this is no justification.

They ought rather to be attached to large and flourishing churches not as a means of adding to their incomes but as part of their education. It is true that they would often be more hindrance than help to the ministers of the parishes to which they went; but our alumni are very loyal, and we count on their help. Just as practising physicians and surgeons constantly give up some of their time to teaching in the hospitals in our great medical centres, ought we not to demand from our older ministers that they should contribute to our teaching and allow our students to come and learn from them some of the practical problems which have to be faced by those who are the physicians of souls?